

When One IS



IN 1873 French author Jules Verne published *Around the World in Eighty Days*, the adventurous tale of an English gentleman and his French valet who circumnavigate the globe in 80 days by train, steam ship, and elephant. Their trip begins in London and includes stops in Suez, Bombay, Calcutta, Hong Kong, Yokohama, San Francisco, and New York. The journey certainly provided the pair with an education in international travel. Today their itinerary—minus the elephants—resembles those offered by global education abroad programs such as Semester at Sea.

Each term, students board the MV Explorer, a six-deck passenger cruise ship with nine classrooms and an occupancy of 836—in essence, a floating university. In four months, students and their professors sail around the world. The spring 2009 itinerary, for example, begins in Nassau, the Bahamas, and ends in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The MV Explorer will call at ports in more than 10 countries, including Spain, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, India, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Japan, Guatemala, and the United States.

“Semester at Sea offers a unique opportunity for students to visit and study several cultures, seeing firsthand their relationship to each other and their interdependence in an ever-shrinking world,” says Marty Greenham, national director of university outreach at Semester at Sea, which offers academic credit through the University of Virginia. “Our program provides an overview of our world, with each discipline integrating the itinerary into the course work.”

Semester at Sea is just one example of multicountry education, which provides an alternative to the traditional model

of studying abroad in a single country. This can involve travel to several countries in the same region, or a course developed within a particular discipline or around a theme, such as global studies. While many such programs are short courses held during summer or winter break, others involve a semester or year overseas, or even a full degree program. Students can split up their time in different locations, or combine studies in one country with an internship in another.

Greenham says traveling programs are ideal for students who have no particular interest in a language or single culture, although they may just come across “their country” along the way. “We are finding that more and more students want to visit several countries during their undergraduate careers and they do not know where to start. Many of our students return to their home campuses and immediately start making plans to study abroad in one of the countries they discovered on their voyage,” he says.

Many students who opt for multicountry programs want to see as much of the world as possible.

Not Enough

Multicountry education offers an alternative to traditional study abroad programs in a single location by allowing students to deepen their knowledge of particular disciplines, to benefit from cross-cultural comparisons, and to learn the lessons of life on the road.





SEMESTER AT SEA

**Students study
aboard the
Semester at
Sea ship.**

“The multicountry experience provided so much excitement. For someone with as much wanderlust as me, being connected to a single university abroad wouldn’t have been enough,” says Lindsey Bergheger, currently a senior at Ohio State University, who participated in Semester at Sea in fall 2007.

One of Bergheger’s classmates, Brett Hearn, also chose to study abroad in more than one country for similar reasons. The history graduate from Brigham Young University (Hawaii), says that experiencing many different cultures gave him the chance to broaden his horizons: “The idea of actually being in each country gave me the pride and confidence of knowing that I actually had the experience of being there and seeing it with my own two eyes, and not just reading it in a book or seeing it on the television.”

“Of course in a single country over an extended period of time, one probably gets the benefits of really grasping the language and deeply indulging in the local culture. Yet, when one gets to see many different cultures they can better grasp the magnitude of the beauty which this world has to offer.”

Depth vs. Breadth

Some educators, such as James Gehlhar, associate vice chancellor for international affairs at East Carolina University, warn that a busy itinerary, especially for shorter courses, can come at the expense of cultural depth.

“Nowadays, there is certainly a push from all directions for students (and programs) to get greater bang for their diminishing buck, which can lead to more carefully crafted plans and itineraries. Finding educational opportunities in multiple countries certainly allows students to experience more cultures in a given time period, which clearly is a plus, but it also works against students gaining deeper understandings of any one culture, definitely a minus unless the overall time period abroad is longer than a semester,” Gehlhar says.

One of the main arguments against multicountry programs is that full immersion is the best way to truly learn a language and culture. However, studying in a single country is no guarantee that immersion will actually occur. In many cases, foreign students are grouped together in the same classes, held in English, and have little contact with locals.

Leah Boersig, a senior at Kenyon College in Ohio who participated in multicountry semester program offered by Antioch University, shares this sentiment.

“The only real benefit I had heard for choosing one country was ‘to immerse yourself in the culture’ of a country, learning its language and customs, and becoming truly absorbed in life there. However, after speaking to many friends who studied, more traditionally, in one country, that is rarely the case of a real student’s experience,” she says.

She says many traditional programs fail to live up to students’ expectations because of a lack of real interaction with the culture of their host country: “Most often, American students are sequestered together in apartments or dormitories, usually with only other Americans but occasionally with other foreign students. Rarely do they meet, much less befriend, anyone from the country they are living in. Because their classes are often in English and their friends there are English speakers, their use of a foreign language is seldom, and they do not often get the opportunity to participate in the ‘cultural experiences’ they are supposedly there for.”

Rachel Sanson, program director at Pacific Discovery—which offers regional programs in New Zealand/Australia, Southeast Asia, and Nepal/Tibet—agrees that many single-country programs don’t necessarily offer cultural depth. “Students on our programs tell us that their, or their friends, ‘regular’ study abroad experiences (where a student attends and lives at a university in another country) are not so rewarding. They have found that they tend to socialize with other students doing the same thing (i.e., other U.S. students studying abroad at the same university) and do not get to meet local people or be as immersed in the local culture as they expected they would,” she says.

This speaks to the importance of program design. Gehlhar says that regardless of the duration of the travel or the number of countries visited, the best education abroad experiences include opportunities for real interaction with the cultures and countries in question. They should encourage students to be more than just disengaged tourists.

“Off-the-shelf multicountry programs should be planned so as to maximize real acquaintance with the peoples, cultures, languages, etc.—and include opportunities for students to analyze similarities and differences between and among the visited countries and societies. Enrollment exchanges and programs that the students themselves design should also allow

room for students’ own reflections on similarities and differences,” says Gehlhar.

Leslie King, assistant director of education abroad at Antioch, says there are advantages of both types of programs and it is really dependent upon what the student is looking for from his or her education abroad experience.

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SEMESTER AT SEA

However, as Gehlhar recommends, Antioch still strives to promote interaction with and exposure to the local culture. “In order to maintain ‘cultural depth’ of all of our programs, we work hard to guarantee direct contact and immersion with the host community, both culturally and academically. Through home stays, independent field research, and individual internship placement, we make sure students experience each country visited to its fullest,” King says.

Boersig feels she was able to gain a cultural foothold in all of the countries she visited through Antioch’s Comparative Women’s and Gender Studies in Europe program, which explores gender, sexuality issues, and feminism in various regions of Europe. The itinerary includes travel to the Netherlands, Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, and England.

Students have the opportunity to learn from many different cultures during a multicountry education abroad experience.

“I would say that in my three weeks in any particular country, I got nearly the exposure to its culture that students staying there for a semester in an American abroad program would get. Perhaps I didn’t know a city’s streets as well by the time I left, but I truly valued my ability to experience and love so many different cities. I felt that whether a student was in a foreign country for two weeks or a semester, they were always just visiting, so I figured I would visit as many places as I could,” Boersig says.

Greenham emphasizes the importance of integrating the course curriculum with the places being visited. Students are well prepared for the stops along their journey: “We do not pretend to be a study abroad program based on immersion, but our students do learn about a culture, its customs, politics, economy, and people. They arrive in a country prepared to witness

firsthand what they have been reading and hearing about in the classroom and throughout the ship.”

“Four, five, or six days is a short time, but students make the most of the faculty-developed field programs and other opportunities, such as homestays and service/volunteer projects. Their interest is peaked to the point of discovering far more in the limited amount of time...The in-country activities serve as a catalyst for bringing the textbooks to life.”

However, some educators do admit that a hectic travel schedule does have its drawbacks. Tom Taylor, associate professor of history at Seattle University and visiting professor at Semester at Sea in 2007, says there wasn’t a great amount of depth, at least in terms of real research: “There was too much going on as far as disruptions from class—for stretches we’d meet once or twice and then be off at port for five days.



Multicountry Education Abroad Popularity Rises in Europe

(But) coming in on a ship is an amazing way to set the stage for a place and I think (that) worked.”

Despite the risk of losing cultural depth, Sanson says the advantages of multicountry education abroad outweigh potential drawbacks: “First, is the potential to contrast similar countries to enhance the learning potential from the students’ experiences. Second, is that it is environmentally responsible to visit more than one country in a given region at once, rather than make multiple trips, because the international flight from the United States has much more negative environmental impact than the regional travel in terms of global warming carbon emissions. Third, students feel that they get more value for their money by going on a multicountry program.”

Cross-cultural Comparison

Sanson particularly emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural comparisons: “Our multicountry programs spend time in similar countries in the same geographical region. This allows participants to contrast countries and cultures that are outwardly similar but do, of course, have complex differences, enabling participants to get a better handle on the country/culture than had they visited just one country and contrasted it with their home country.”

Antioch also sees cross-cultural comparison as one of the main advantages of multicountry programs. Both of its traveling courses are promoted as comparative field studies programs in each of their respective academic disciplines.

Similarly, Semester at Sea faculty say the ship provided an opportunity to allow students to analyze differences between countries. Taylor agrees with Sanson that the main benefit of the multicountry model is comparative.

“Being able to see many different places at least gets students to think about similarities and differences in experiences. I was pretty pleased that my classes got students thinking about why some things happen in some places and not in others. What factors—environment, culture, politics, religion—impact historical events?” he says.

From the student’s perspective, Hearn says the comparative aspect of Semester at Sea taught him that people have more similarities than differences: “Sometimes as Americans, we tend to have been socialized or taught to believe that there is an ‘other,’ or different from us. So we go around looking at people, all kinds of people, with a microscope saying, ‘Uh,

Multicountry master’s degrees are becoming increasingly common in European higher education through programs such as Erasmus Mundus, which aims to enhance the quality of higher education and promote intercultural understanding and student mobility through cooperation with countries outside of Europe.

The program supports European master’s courses by allowing students and visiting scholars from around the world to engage in postgraduate study at European universities. Master’s courses must be offered by a consortium of at least three universities in at

least three different European countries.

The courses must be “integrated” to be selected under Erasmus Mundus, which means they incorporate a study period in at least two of the three participating universities and must lead to the award of a recognized double, multiple, or joint degree.

Erasmus Mundus supports approximately 90 master’s courses in a wide variety of disciplines. Grants are available for around 5,000 graduate students from non-EU countries, as well as for 4,000 EU graduate students to study in third countries.

Source: European Commission



aw, wow, they are so exotic.’ But once one has been around and really opened their eyes to the reality, they see that everyone is basically living for the same human desires. Everyone is trying to live their sometimes very hard lives, and wake up every day only to feed and love their families.”

An International Education

While many programs emphasize the cultural component, others explicitly state that their focus is on the particular discipline rather than on the cultural aspects of their destination. Education abroad in these cases often means global—although not necessarily local—experience.

University of Delaware (UD) offers several discipline-based multicountry education abroad programs tailored to students with a specific major. Although more than 40 percent of UD's student body studies overseas, almost 90 percent of these students participate in four- or five-week courses held during winter or summer session. These shorter courses are particularly conducive to intensive study of a specific subject.

An example of UD's offerings include a five-week program in January to New Zealand, Australia, and Hong Kong. Students, who are accompanied by UD professors, spend a week in Queenstown, three weeks in Sydney, and a week in Hong Kong, with day trips to Shenzhen and Macau. Students are required to prepare for the trip by attending class meetings and

working on assignments during the semester prior to travel. Participants are junior and senior undergraduate business school majors, primarily within marketing, finance, and management.

"The format is to visit a different company each day. Company visits typically involve presentations by company executives, including Q&A, followed by a plant tour. Company presentations are focused on whatever courses the students are taking," says Carter Broach, faculty director of the course and a professor in the Department of Business Administration at UD.

Although they include a cultural component, the focus of the UD program is on the international experience. "While we augment the program with cultural excursions, the primary focus is on comparing the

Tips

FOR

Designing Successful

MULTICOUNTRY EDUCATION ABROAD

Programs

Multicountry programs

should be planned so as to maximize real acquaintance with the peoples, cultures, languages, etc.—and include opportunities for students to analyze similarities and differences between and among the visited countries. Students should also be encouraged to explore the culture in other ways than just as tourists, for example through meeting locals, home stays, service learning, and internships.

Especially for short courses, thorough predeparture preparation, including reading and writing, is essential. Fieldwork should also be integrated into the coursework, which should be designed with a central disciplinary focus.

The comparative aspect is the biggest advantage multicountry programs have over single-country education abroad programs. Observing multiple cultures gives students greater opportunity to recognize their own views, perceptions, beliefs, and ideals.

Spend time not only preparing students for where they are going but also processing where they have been. During the trip, especially with several destinations one after another, the danger can be to not reflect on what happened in the rush to prepare for the next stop, but the learning comes from getting students to digest what they saw and experienced.

Make a multiple-year commitment to conduct multicountry programs. The most effective advertisements for programs are prior participants. There are small numbers applying for new programs in early years until word-of-mouth among students builds greater interest.

Remember, when designing your program, that you have two target audiences: the students (participants) and their parents (bill payers). They

have different expectations from the program. For example, parents want programs to consist of at least two to three credit hours to justify their child's participation in the program.

Travel in multicountry programs should be kept to a minimum, otherwise costs will increase, and time will be wasted on logistics. The decision to change location should always be firmly based on an academic justification, not on the desire to experience a new location or make a program appear more attractive to students. ("Well, if we're in Switzerland we might as well go to Italy too, as it's so popular among students; there have to be some companies there that would be worth visiting.")

Classes on the road should have a lot of flexibility built into them. Things change—you may not make it to some destination for some reason (weather, political events) or unexpected opportunities may open up, so the class schedule needs to be flexible to adjust and take opportunities as they come.

Try to develop institutional memory for recurring program requirements. The policies and procedures of visa applications for the various countries visited should be shared with faculty directors.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BECCA ASAKI

NZ/Aus/HK companies' strategies to those in the U.S. Those comparisons include contrasting business cultures there versus in the U.S. So, the broader cultural context is a distant third in priority," says Broach.

The choice of destinations is a combination of what students want and what provides a useful academic experience. "The major draw for students is Australia; it's sunny and hot there in January—perfect for getting a suntan. The secondary draw is Queenstown because it is the extreme sport capital of [New Zealand], if not the world. There is a happy confluence of academic and extracurricular interests in these two locales," explains Broach.

In Sydney—the business capital of Australia—the group visits a mix of Australian companies and subsidiaries of U.S. companies. Broach says the focus is on international business instead of local peculiarities: "In both cases, we are more interested in their international business activities rather than the domestic ones."

He adds that Hong Kong was chosen as a way to introduce students to the largest potential market in the world. "Hong Kong is a business hub for China with the advantage that most international business is conducted in English. Our foray to Shenzhen is to expose students to mainland Chinese business," Broach says.

Going Global

While shorter courses often require a trade-off between cultural immersion and subject depth, other, longer programs allow students to experience the best of both worlds.

With six international centers in Costa Rica, China, Japan, South Africa, India, and the United States, Global College, headquartered at the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University in New York, offers a unique four-year undergraduate degree in global studies. The program combines the in-depth cultural and linguistic immersion of single-country programs with the cross-cultural aspects of multicountry programs.

Over four years, students are exposed to three world regions where they pursue field work and independent study, as well as hone their cross-cultural communication and writing skills. In addition to area studies and language courses, there is a seminar each year introducing students to critical texts in theory and method. Many of the courses also incorporate service learning, homestays, and internships.

With the current program, all incoming freshman spend a year in Costa Rica, where they learn the basics of qualitative research, intercultural communication, as well as intensive Spanish. They also explore Latin America, with two longer field trips to Nicaragua and Ecuador.

Becca Asaki, a student at Long Island University's Global College, performs a Zulu dance.

The second year comprises a full year in either India or China. In their third year, students have two options: one semester in Japan and one in South Africa, or they can participate in the Comparative Religion and Culture Program (CRC). With the CRC program, students stay six to eight weeks in Taiwan, Thailand, India, and Turkey.

Their final year includes field work and data collection in the autumn, and culminates with a semester back in the United States at the campus in Brooklyn. Students spend the spring writing their senior thesis, as well as doing an internship at a New York-based organization.

“Once one has been around and really opened their eyes to the reality, they see that everyone is basically living for the same human desires. Everyone is trying to live their sometimes very hard lives, and wake up every day only to feed and love their families.”

Becca Asaki, currently a senior at Global College, has benefited from both intense cultural immersion, as well as her participation in the CRC program, where she studied Islam in Turkey, India, and New York. “I do believe that staying one place gives you greater depth into one culture that you don’t get as much in a multicountry study abroad. I studied for a year in Costa Rica and I feel that I know that culture better than any other because I studied there the longest,” she explains.

“However, when studying Islam in three different countries, I felt that I learned more about the religion of Islam than I would have if I had only studied it in one country. I was able to see how the lived religion is so diverse and culturally influenced. I feel that I have better understanding of Islam because of my multicountry study abroad experience.”

Experiential Learning

All of the courses at Global College are based on an experiential learning model. According to the program Web site, this includes five major components:

- through a learning plan formulated jointly by the student and his or her faculty adviser;
- through regular advising sessions, in which a student’s ongoing work is reviewed and suggestions are made for proceeding;

- through presentations given before the learning community in which students reflect on, organize, and orally present their study as a means of clarifying their learning and giving others the opportunity to benefit from what each student has learned;

- through writing a portfolio of learning in which learning is documented, analyzed, presented, and reflected upon;

- through faculty evaluation of the portfolio, the basis upon which students receive feedback on their work and upon which credit is granted.

Joann Halpern, director of academic affairs and senior studies at Global College, says that while students spend most of their time learning in the field, this is enhanced through opportunities to integrate their experiences in an academic setting. “You’re not just going out and doing something blindly, you’re going out and coming back and reflecting and processing your experience,” she says. “The key is that the field experiences are integrated into the courses.”

Asaki explains how the experiential learning model shaped her exposure to the local cultures: “Many of our programs make a point of introducing us to local students or people our age to help us make connections. Our school’s emphasis on experiential education encourages these interactions, which is why they facilitate them in the first place. For example, instead of having a lecture on Muharram [the first month of the Islamic calendar], we went to a masjid [mosque] where Muharram was being celebrated, or learned how to do a sumi-e painting [ink or wash painting] in Japan rather than just talking about it.”

Asaki sums up her experience with her multicountry degree program: “I chose Global College because it is the only school where you can study outside of the United States for three and a half years and still get a degree from the United States. It also allows you to travel to many different countries, which was appealing to me because I wasn’t exactly sure where I wanted to study. I don’t believe it is for everyone because it can be very demanding to constantly change cultures, to study abroad for four years, and because not everyone excels in an experiential learning environment. But for those who can handle it, it is life changing.” **IE**

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